

# Washington Roadless Areas Fact Sheet

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## **Background**

In January 2001, after an extensive public process that generated nearly 2 million comments, the U.S. Forest Service created a roadless rule to protect the remaining roadless areas within the National Forest System. The rule generally prohibited construction of new roads and timber harvesting within the inventoried roadless areas (IRAs) identified by the Forest Service in the 1970s during the RARE II and in subsequent forest planning.

In Washington, the 2001 Roadless Rule protected a little more than 2 million of the 9.2 million acres of national forest land in Washington's seven national forests: Olympic, Mount Baker-Snoqualmie, Gifford Pinchot, Wenatchee, Okanogan, Colville, Umatilla, and a small section of the Idaho Panhandle.

These wild areas provide important outdoor recreational opportunities, including hunting, fishing, hiking, birding, canoeing, and mountain biking, which a vast number of Washingtonians enjoy, and upon which numerous businesses and local communities depend. They provide a source of clean drinking water for many Washingtonians, and they provide habitat for wildlife species sensitive to human disturbance and habitat modification.

The Forest Service has determined that the following rare or endangered species in Washington are likely to be adversely affected by road-building in roadless areas: the Canadian lynx, the bald eagle, the brown pelican, the Northern spotted owl, Snake River sockeye salmon, Hood Canal summer chum salmon, lower Columbia River and Puget Sound Chinook salmon, Columbia River and Snake River steelhead, and bull trout. During the public comment period leading to the adoption of the 2001 Roadless Rule, Washingtonians submitted more than 80,000 comments – 96% supported complete protection of *all* roadless areas.

## **The 2005 Roadless Rule**

In May 2005, the Bush Administration repealed the 2001 Roadless Rule and replaced it with a process for state-specific rulemaking. Under the new rule, governors have 18 months (the petition is due on November 13, 2006) to petition the Secretary of Agriculture to establish management requirements for all or any portion of the inventoried roadless areas within their states. If a governor chooses not to submit a petition, the management requirements for the roadless areas will revert to the provisions of the individual forest plans for each forest within which the roadless area is located.

In effect, the 2005 Roadless Rule made nearly 716,000 acres of previously protected roadless areas in Washington potentially vulnerable to road building and timber harvesting under existing

forest plans. An interim directive is currently in place, which requires that the U.S. Forest Service Chief approve any project inconsistent with roadless values.

State petitions developed under the 2005 Roadless Rule must include specific information and recommendations on the management requirements for individual inventoried roadless areas within that particular state. If the Secretary accepts the petition, the Forest Service will conduct a state-specific National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis and rulemaking for the roadless areas in the state.

### **Governor Gregoire's Intentions**

In November of 2005, Governor Gregoire asked the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture to create a streamlined process that would continue the protection of roadless areas provided by the 2001 Roadless Rule. The federal government denied the request. The Governor thus intends to submit a petition in accordance with the procedural requirements of the 2005 Roadless Rule in order to ensure that the character of Washington's roadless areas are protected for future generations.

### **Public Input/Comment to Governor Gregoire**

Governor Gregoire is very much aware of Washingtonians' desire to protect roadless areas in national forests and has made clear her intention to maintain protection of these public lands. As she proceeds forward, she wants to hear from all Washingtonians regarding how they want our roadless lands managed. She seeks specific information and recommendations on the management requirements, such as:

- What roadless area values are most important to Washingtonians;
- What management activities Washingtonians would prefer to occur in roadless areas;
- Elements of the 2001 Roadless Rule that should be modified .

### **Comments must be submitted or postmarked by October 13, 2006**

For more information about the issues and documents discussed above, please visit the Governor's website at: [www.governor.wa.gov/roadless/](http://www.governor.wa.gov/roadless/)